

## OPEN LETTER TO BEN SANTER

25 July 1996

Dr. Benjamin D. Santer  
PCMDI, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory  
P.O. Box 808, Mail Stop L-264  
Livermore, CA 94550

Dear Ben:

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the American Meteorological Society and the Trustees of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), we take this opportunity to support you and the other scientists who have participated in the preparation of the recent IPCC report **Climate Change 1995---The Science of Climate Change**. We are aware of the tremendous effort you and other climate scientists from many countries around the world have put into this document, and the thought, care and objectivity which have characterized the process throughout.

We believe that attacks on the IPCC process in general, and you in particular, such as occurred in the editorial-page piece in *The Wall Street Journal* by Frederick Seitz (Attachment 1), have no place in the scientific debate about issues related to global change. Dr. Seitz is a prominent scientist, but his expertise is not atmospheric sciences and he was not involved in the IPCC process. *The Wall Street Journal* essay is especially disturbing because it steps over the boundary from disagreeing with the science to attacking the honesty and integrity of a particular scientist, namely yourself.

There appears to be a concerted and systematic effort by some individuals to undermine and discredit the scientific process that has led many scientists working on understanding climate to conclude that there is a very real possibility that humans are modifying Earth's climate on a global scale. Rather than carrying out a legitimate scientific debate through the peer-reviewed literature, they are waging in the public media a vocal campaign against scientific results with which they disagree.

We believe that it is important to separate two issues. The first one is the scientific question of how and why climate changes. The second question is, if

the climate is changing and humans are causing part of this change, then what should societies do about it. The appropriate arena for debating the first, scientific question is through peer-reviewed scientific publications---not the media. However, the appropriate arenas for debating the second question of public policy are the media and political fora, because answering the second question is inherently a public and political process. And it is the responsibility of the scientific community to participate in the public and policy processes as well as in the scientific process.

The recent exchange in *The Wall Street Journal* is an example of why attempting to carry out a scientific debate in the media is inappropriate. In response to the Seitz opinion piece, you and 40 other scientists prepared a careful, thoughtful response, which is reprinted in its entirety below (Attachment 2). This letter was printed in *The Wall Street Journal* with minor changes, but without the names of the 40 distinguished scientists who supported your rebuttal, including the other three lead co-authors of Chapter 8.

More significantly, a letter supporting you (Attachment 3) from Dr. Bert Bolin, Chairman of the IPCC, and Co-chairs of IPCC Working Group I Drs. John Houghton from the United Kingdom and Luiz Gylvan Meira Filho from Brazil which strongly supported your letter was edited so severely that less than half of the original letter was published. Eliminated from the original version was the crucial part explaining the IPCC review process (which was the stated basis for the Seitz attack) and the key, reviewed and agreed-upon conclusion '*our ability to quantify the human influence on global climate is currently limited....nevertheless, the balance of evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on global climate.*'

This example illustrates why essays based upon opinion and other communications in the media or other forms of popular public debate are inappropriate mechanisms for legitimate scientific debate. Letters and opinion pieces can be written by any individual, and one opinion piece can carry as much or more weight in the public's mind as a letter signed by 40 scientists who have passed scientific muster over many years by publishing on the topic in the peer-reviewed literature. By necessity, letters and opinion pieces in the public media must be short, simple and non-technical, and supporting scientific data or theories cannot be provided. Contributions to the public media are not reviewed by scientific experts and can make assertions and statements that are totally without scientific foundation. And finally, key parts may be edited or removed altogether, leading to the possibility that serious changes to the meaning of the contribution may be introduced.

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The larger debate related to what actions should be taken by the nation and the world in response to global change will take place in the public and political fora; and it is our responsibility as scientists to take an appropriate role in that larger debate, as you and others have done. What is important scientific information and how it is interpreted in the policy debates is an important part of our jobs. We appreciate your efforts in this respect as well. That is, after all, the very reason for the mix of science and policy in the IPCC.

In summary, we restate our strong support for the integrity and openness of the IPCC process and for you and the many other scientists of diverse views who have participated objectively and in good faith in providing this valuable assessment of the state of our knowledge about climate change.

Sincerely,

*Susan K. Avery*  
Dr. Susan K. Avery  
Chairwoman  
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Attachments as noted in text of letter

cc: Dr. Frederick Seitz